

# Protecting false killer whales

By [Jessica Else The Garden Island](#) | Friday, July 27, 2018, 12:05 a.m.

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• Caleb Jones / AP file photo

Kina, a 41-year-old false killer whale, works with trainer Jeff Pawloski at Sea Life Park in Waimanalo, Oahu, in this 2017 photo.



• National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration via AP file photo

False killer whales swim off the coast of Oahu in this 2016 photo.



Caleb Jones / AP file photo

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LIHUE — Kauai waters are now critical habitat for false killer whales, thanks to a National Marine Fisheries Service designation published Tuesday in the Federal Register.

The critical habitat includes about 17,500 square miles of ocean, and the rule goes into effect Aug 23.

That's with the exception of 14 areas requested by the state Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and 13 areas requested by the U.S. Navy. Around Kauai, exclusions include the Pacific Missile Range Facility's offshore ranges, including the Shallow Water Training Range, the Barking Sands Tactical Underwater Range, and the Barking Sands Underwater Range Extension, west of Kauai.

Also excluded from the habitat is the Navy Kingfisher Range northeast of Niihau, Warning Area 188 west of Kauai, and the Kaulakahi Channel portion of Warning Area 186, which is the channel between Niihau and Kauai and extending east.

“(These areas are exempt) from the critical habitat designation because we have determined that the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of inclusion, and exclusion will not result in extinction of the species,” NMFS said in their Federal Register publication.

Cascadia Research Collective’s Robert Baird announced Wednesday his upcoming research project in Kauai waters in the PMRF range and along Kauai’s west coast in August, and said the Main Hawaiian Islands insular false killer whales are on the top of their list.

“The Main Hawaiian Islands insular false killer whale population, we’ve only encountered once off Kauai before,” Baird said. “We’ll be doing work with every species we encounter, but we hope to encounter some of our higher priority species, like the insular false killer whales.”

He said during their two-week project, the team hopes to encounter them at least once, and ideally Navy personnel will be able to record them with their underwater hydrophones as well.

About 150 false killer whales call Hawaii waters home, according to Cascadia Research, and the population was listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act in November 2012.

The new critical habitat designation applies to waters from 45 meters to 3,200 meters in depth surrounding the main Hawaiian Islands from Niihau to Hawaii Island, under the ESA.

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